

Obesity & the Built Environment

Alex Molnar, Ph.D.
Professor & Director
Education Policy Studies Laboratory
Arizona State University

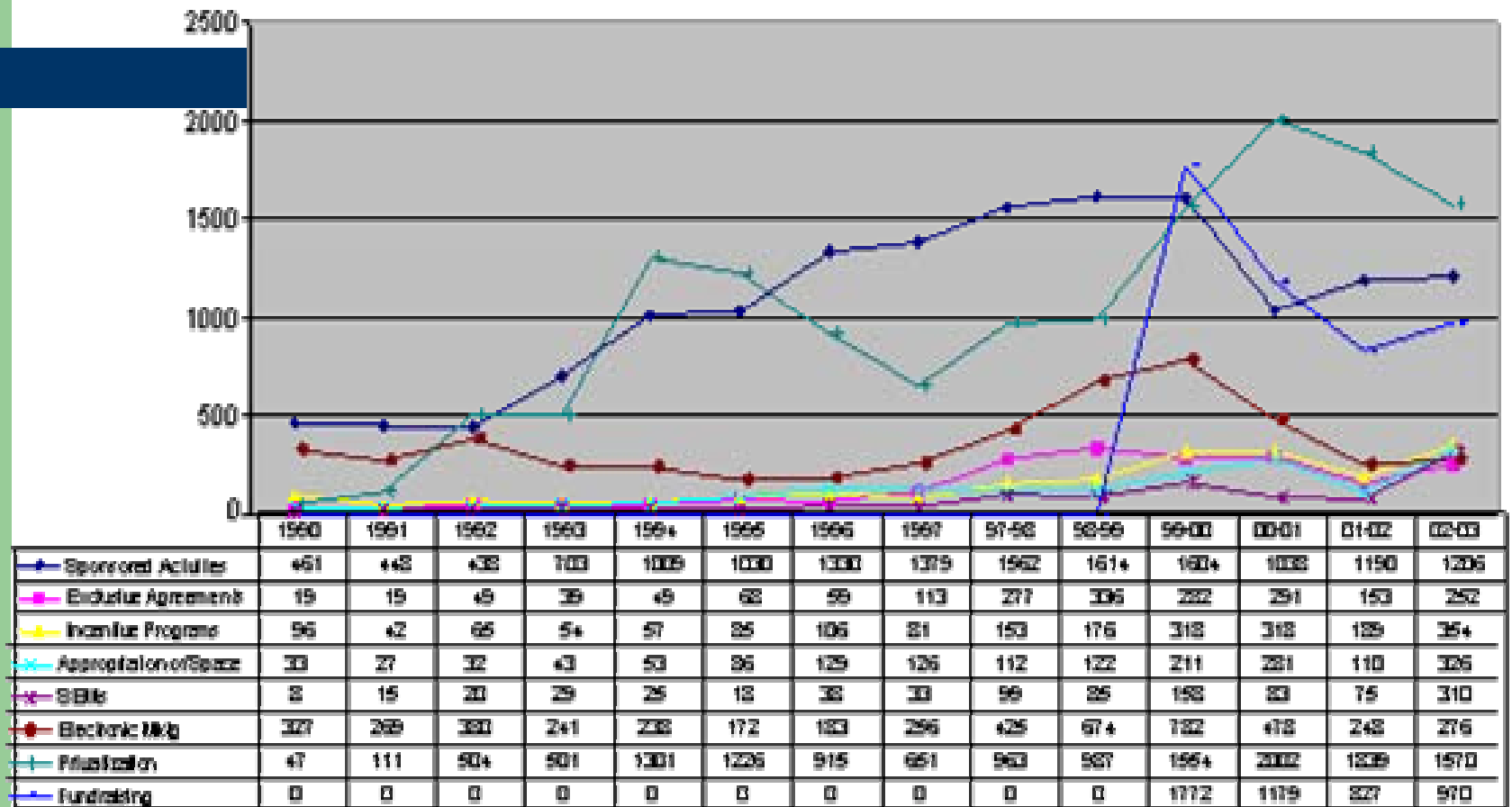
Introduction

- Schools have taken on increasing responsibilities while often suffering a reduction in resources available to them.
- Schools are under powerful political and economic pressure to find non-public funds to support their programs and to collaborate with corporations.
- Children are exposed at school to corporate marketing which encourages children to make nutritional choices that are the most profitable though not necessarily the most healthful.

Commercial Activities in Schools

- The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) has been monitoring media references to schoolhouse commercialism for more than a decade.
- CERU examines media trends in eight categories related to schoolhouse commercialism.

Overall Trend, By Commercializing Activity, All Presses 1990-2003



Exclusive Agreements & Student Health

- References to agreements that give marketers exclusive rights to sell a product or a service on school or district grounds were up by 65%, to 252 citations from 153 in 2002-03.
- Most of the citations referred to exclusive agreements with bottling companies.

Exclusive Agreements & Student Health Continued

- In many cases, exclusive agreements contain consumption clauses, i.e. schools get more money when more soft drinks are sold.¹
- Schools continue to place students at risk in spite of health warnings aimed at limiting the availability of foods of minimal nutritional value, including soft drinks, on school campuses.

¹ U.S. General Accounting Office. (2000, Sept.). *Commercialism in Schools*, GAO-HEHS-00-156, online at <http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/CERU/Articles/gaoreport.pdf>

The Backlash Against Sugar

- Attacks on exclusive soft-drink agreements and the marketing of food of little or no nutritional value have increased
- More attention has been focused on problems of childhood obesity and other serious health consequences associated with diets heavy in sugary snacks.

The Backlash Against Sugar Continued

- Policymakers, school administrators, professional organizations, parents, and other concerned citizens are speaking out in an effort to curb commercializing activity that undermines student health.
- Some commercial activities, including exclusive agreements, are being challenged on legal grounds.

Defending Exclusive Agreements

- Efforts to block exclusive agreements remain contentious.
- Many school leaders are concerned about the potential revenue loss associated with the loss of exclusive agreements.

Conclusion

- School commercialism trends research utilizing secondary sources conducted by CERU suggests that commercial activities in schools are increasing.
- Candy and snack food manufactures, soft-drink bottlers, and fast food restaurants seem to be among the companies that market most heavily in schools.
- The public school environment is increasingly shaped by marketing messages that undermine student health and create an unhealthy environment for children.